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BASE Project Annual Report 2017

MISSION

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The mission of the BASE Project is to provide services to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in Leicester and Leicestershire that create opportunities for people to progress into work, learning, and life.

# The BASE Project is more than just an employability project – it’s about empowering people.

At the BASE Project we believe that every person, no matter their background, has the right to learn, develop, achieve, and progress. Through our project we offer a range of employability services, careers advice, and practical support to help people address broader barriers to employment such as vulnerable housing, destitution, and life skills.

We deliver **Big Lottery-funded** employment and skills services at our offices in central Leicester. We also run one-to-one advice sessions that support individuals who are disadvantaged and need practical support with the issues affecting their daily lives. Through our services we also offer academic advice to refugees and asylum seekers who are struggling to access university education.

WORKING WITH OUR PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS, WE LOOK FORWARD TO BUILDING ON THE SUCCESSES OF THE FIRST YEAR, TO FURTHER IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT AND LIFE OUTCOMES FOR REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS IN LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE.



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WELCOME

**Welcome to the BASE Project’s first annual report.**

**This is our opportunity to share all that we have achieved since the project began in May 2017 and to thank our participant users, volunteers, partners and staff for their hard work in our first year.**

Being awarded the Big Lottery ‘Reaching Communities’ fund was an important landmark for Afro Innovation Group and our first opportunity to expand our employability and holistic support services across the city and county.

We were particularly excited to have the opportunity to deliver an employability project to people who face barriers accessing the local labour market, such as young people from BAME communities, refugees, and the long-term unemployed. Regardless of what community they come from, what work they wanted to do, and what previous experience they had, we were committed to supporting them.

We were also excited to have the opportunity to design a new sub-project, BASE Academic Support, following high demand for access to higher education among refugees and asylum seekers. This new line of work has proven to be of benefit and necessity.

We are committed to not only supporting people to get into work, but to addressing broader barriers to employment – housing, destitution, debt, social isolation and life skills. We encourage people to become more active in their local communities and we develop activities and networks that will support them in their lives.

This report commends everyone involved in the project – first and foremost, the people that come to us for support and, in doing so, achieve their goals. Their stories are inspirational and the lessons learnt and goals achieved motivate us to aim higher and better.

We are proud of our new partner relationships that enable us to refine our provision across people of different backgrounds and skills across Leicester, Leicestershire and beyond.

Our team of dedicated volunteers works hard to provide high-quality support to our participants. They offer us invaluable support with our casework, administration and communications and we are proud to be part of their own journey to employment.

We know that the work we are doing is improving people’s lives – but there is still a lot to do. Working collaboratively, we look forward to building on the successes of this year, to further improve employment outcomes.

**Evariste Tshindio**

Project Manager

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# PARTNERSHIPS ACHIEVED

**Leicester University** – We have a work placement agreement with Leicester University, offering work placements to undergraduate students.

**Nottingham Trent University** – We have a work placement with NTU, offering work placements to students of the Faculty of Social Sciences ‘@Work’ module.

**Leicester City of Sanctuary** – Referrals and joint recreational activities.

**Race Equality Centre (TREC)** – We are members of the Multi-Agency Forum (MAF) hosted by TREC. As MAF members, we convene every 3 months with local statutory agencies to communicate the needs and issues faced by our users.

**Job Centre Plus** – We receive referrals from JCP to support people who are long-term unemployed to get back into work.

**EngageME** - Engage ME assists us to tailor, improve and transform our services to be more accessible and more relevant to minority people and communities.

**Leicester Adult Skills and Learning** – LASALS delivers ESOL classes at our organisation for people whose first language is not English.

**British Red Cross** - mutual referrals and exchange of expertise

**Bridge Homelessness to Hope** – mutual referrals and exchange of expertise.

**Zinthiya Trust** – mutual referrals and exchange of expertise

**After 18** - mutual referrals and exchange of expertise

**Shama Women’s Centre** – mutual referrals and exchange of expertise

**Open Hands Leicester -** referrals

**The Welcome Project** – referrals

# OUR ACCESSIBILITY

Our BASE Project is provided in Leicester.

We have offices in central Leicester that are accessible to many participants with just one means of transport.

Our offices are fully accessible to people with disabilities and to families.

We have casework rooms where participants can discuss their matter confidentially.

About the Service

**The BASE Back-to-Work Project supports adult refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from all backgrounds across Leicester and Leicestershire to get back into paid work.**

**We provide:**

One-to-one initial assessments

Individual action plans

Sessions on CVs, cover letters, job search and interviews

Advice on benefits, debt, housing or employment problems

Local information on GP surgeries, emergency food parcels, emergency grants, courts, etc.

Prevention work: Skills for life, advice partnerships, advocacy to local authorities

Signposting or referrals to specialist organisations

Recreational and befriending activities

Work experience opportunities for people from hard-to-reach groups

Work placements for students

Free internet access for job search

Interpretation and translation

PEOPLE WHO USED THE SERVICE

**Refugees, asylum seekers, migrants from all countries, and local people facing disadvantage accessed the service by presenting to our offices or by booking an appointment with one of our staff.**

**Adults on Jobseekers’ Allowance/Universal Credit can access the service through a referral from the Job Centre. Students can access a work placement by applying through their university’s** Since May 2017, we have provided a service to over 1000 people. Many participants present more than once about problems that affect their daily lives.

**OUR SERVICES IN NUMBERS:**

25 people supported into education

education

85 people supported for employment

1900 people supported holistically

33 jobs attained

8 under-18 referrals to FUTURES

**Employability Team, and volunteers can apply directly through our website.**

11 work placements

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THE JOURNEY TO WORK

At the BASE Project, we believe that everyone who wants to work should be enabled to work. However, everyone faces unique circumstances and has a different way of getting there. Each person whom we support has a holistic assessment and an individual action plan that is designed just for them, with the help of our employment team.

# THE JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT WITH THE BASE PROJECT TYPICALLY LOOKS LIKE THIS:

**Stage 1**

**Participant referral and Individual assessment**

**Stage 2**

**Every participant has a dedicated employment advisor, who helps them explore their employment options. Together they put in place an ‘individual action plan’**

**Stage 3**

**The participant attends mentoring sessions with the employment advisor, which might include creating a CV, cover letters, job applications, practice interviews, arranging training needed, and exploring work placements.**

**Stage 4**

**Support with benefits, housing, destitution, social isolation, and/or referrals to specialist organizations.**

**Stage 5**

**Job attained!**

**Once people have found a job, our staff team is at hand to provide advice and support with employment-related issues.**

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THE JOURNEY TO HIGHER EDUCATION

With ‘Base Academic Support’, we believe that everyone who wants to study at university or college should study, but that everyone faces unique circumstances and has a different way of achieving this. Each person whom we support has an individual action plan that is designed just for them, with the help of an Academic Advisor.

# THE JOURNEY WITH ‘BASE ACADEMIC SUPPORT’ TYPICALLY LOOKS LIKE THIS:

**Stage 5**

**Education offer attained!**

**Once people have accessed education, our staff team is at hand to provide advice and support with academic-related issues.**

**Stage 4**

**Support with benefits, housing, destitution, social isolation, and/or referrals to specialist organisations.**

**Stage 3**

**The participant attends pre-academic sessions with the employment advisor, which might include making a UCAS application, student finance, scholarship applications, arranging English classes needed, and exploring different education providers.**

**Stage 2**

**Every participant has a dedicated academic advisor, who helps them explore their options for education. Together they put in place an ‘individual action plan’.**

**Stage 1**

**Participant referral and Individual assessment**

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PARTICIPANT STORIES

MARIA’S STORY

Dear Afro Innovation team,

I want to provide feedback on the support you gave me to access employment after I was referred to the BASE Project by the Job Centre.

I studied abroad and worked overseas for a few years, but when I returned to the UK I found it very challenging to translate my international work experience into something that local employers would be interested in.

Your team’s support was excellent in providing the following:

* A four-week work placement
* A reference letter, since I had no UK referees
* Helping me cope with the challenging situation of not finding work locally
* Exploring career options
* Helping me increase my confidence and self-esteem.

Without this beneficial support it would been much harder to find my current job. I have now been working full-time for 8 months!

**ADA’S STORY**

**ADA’S STORY**

When Ada\* presented to Afro Innovation, she was an asylum seeker who had been forced to terminate her university education twice: once when she became internally displaced in her own country, and another time when she fled to the UK.

She found out about our services when a member of our staff team was invited to make a presentation about the BASE Project at the local university.

Ada hasn’t given up! With help from our staff, she has secured a place at university on a prestigious programme. Her BASE academic adviser helped her with her UCAS application and personal statement, researched scholarship opportunities with her, and wrote a reference letter for a scholarship that specifically supports asylum seekers.

Ada is now attending tailored English classes through BASE to prepare for her IELTS exam and enroll at university.

(\**names have been changed for data protection purposes*\*)

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SUPPORTING OUR PARTICIPANTS HOLISTICALLY

**Jade\* came to Afro Innovation in the third month of our project, as soon as she had successfully attained refugee status. She was very anxious and had never worked or lived independently in the UK before. She needed help with housing, benefits, employment and social support. Having just moved to Leicester from another city, she was struggling to find the support she needed.**

We helped Jade with housing by helping her search for social housing landlords, housing options available for new refugees, and applying for housing benefit. Additionally, we supported her with obtaining a National Insurance number and applying for Jobseeker’s Allowance, and carried out several one-to-one sessions on her CV and interview skills. We discovered in these sessions that she had a real interest in customer relations and was a fluent French speaker. Therefore, we explored what opportunities were available locally working with customers and requiring language skills. We approached Amazon and explained the support we provide as an organisation in supporting people facing disadvantages with getting into employment. They gave Jade two interviews, which she completed successfully, and they then progressed her into a full-time, French-speaking position in customer relations.

Jade also attended our social activities to meet people and make new friends, and we celebrated her birthday at one of our community events.

Today, Jade is employed full-time, is renting privately and is claiming the benefits she is entitled to. She has become an active member of our organisation and we regularly seek her feedback on our work.

**JADE HAS THANKED US FOR HELPING HER AT SUCH A TRANSITIONAL TIME IN HER LIFE.**

**SHE WILL BE SOON JOINING THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF OUR NEW PROJECT FOR DISADVANTAGED WOMEN**.

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PROJECT OUTCOMES

To achieve **Outcome 1** of **better chances of employment and improved employability skills**, we undertook the following activities:

* **49 one-to-one holistic assessments**, where we took stock of the beneficiary’s skills, previous experience and education, and identified progression pathways into work such as trainings needed, local employers and opportunities.
* **3 student work placements** with students from Nottingham Trent University: two students worked as caseworkers, and one worked as communications and social media administrator.
* **11 work placements** with persons referred from Job Centre Plus
* **15 volunteers** who supported with administration, casework and communications. The profile of the volunteers is as follows: 2 asylum seekers, 3 undergraduate students, 3 master’s students, one employed professional, one retired, and 5 people on JSA (not referred by the Job Centre).
* **15 refugees and asylum seekers** have received academic support under our BASE Academic support, which started in March 2018 and has been running for two months. Three people were supported in submitting UCAS applications (so far, 2 have been accepted and are currently supported in finding scholarships). Five people registered for pre-academic English.
* A researcher from York University performed **interviews with** **9 refugees and asylum seekers** to explore their barriers to accessing education in the UK. The interviews were performed confidentially, with consent, and will be used to influence policy-making.
* To achieve better chances of employment we successfully supported **7 people in appealing against benefit sanctions** for JSA and ESA. Benefit sanctions are common and cause significant stress and financial hardship, limiting people’s ability to continue pursuing employment.
* We have successfully claimed ‘recourse to public funds’ for **9 migrant women**, who were unable to claim benefits for their children and were at risk of destitution.

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To achieve **Outcome 2** of **people connecting and integrating with the local community**, we undertook the following activities:

* **Weekly drop-ins**. We hold a weekly drop-in session for BASE every Wednesday from 1:00 to 2:00 PM. It includesthe opportunity to talk and socialise with others and take part in a social activity such as board games or story-telling. These sessions have achieved stronger relationships among users and increased knowledge about our services.
* **Community events**. We carried out 9 community events between October 2017 and March 2018 with funding from Near Neighbours. Our BASE users were invited to join these events, which included music sessions, multi-faith celebrations, food, games, and storytelling. At least 50% of BASE users participated, and they reported new friendships and a stronger sense of belonging in the local community.

To achieve **Outcome 3 of people having knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as a result of advocacy support**, we have undertaken the following activities:

* Provided individualised support and advocacy to more than 1000 people with welfare, debt, housing, family, employment problems, and consumer
* Conducted a public ‘child safety online’ workshop provided by EngageMe that received 100% positive feedback
* Provided student finance advice to 9 refugees and asylum seekers interested in studying in UK Higher Education
* Advocated to local MP for 21 participants when their issue could not be solved by ourselves or other local services
* Made X referrals to immigration solicitors for users

To achieve **Outcome 4 of people being more aware of life in the UK**, we have undertaken the following activities:

* Supported over 1500 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to become more aware of dealing with money issues, how to get help on a low income, how to go about finding somewhere to live, and how to deal with things like problems at work or relationship breakdown
* Made 5 referrals to the Red Cross for life skills courses
* Provided information and guidance to over 250 people on local food and clothing banks and individual grants

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OUR CONTRIBUTION TO EARLY ACTION

**Early action in welfare advice:** Key to our success is challenging decisions about employment-related benefits. In the past year, we helped people in work-related groups to successfully appeal 7 benefit refusals: two JSA sanctions, four ESA refusals, and one PIP refusal. We perform benefit checks on all users to ensure everyone is claiming what they are entitled to and we are in the process of creating a new partnership with a welfare law service. Additionally, we have successfully claimed ‘recourse to public funds’ for 9 migrant women, who were unable to claim benefits for their children and were at risk of destitution. As a direct impact of our work, 34 people have maximised their income and 13 have had the best possible chance to remain on benefits whilst not physically or mentally able to work.

**Early action in empowerment to make the right choices:** We are committed to not only supporting people to find a job, but to develop skills that will support them in their lives – to meet their priorities in UK life. We refer new refugees and migrants to Life Skills courses conducted by the British Red Cross, a partner organisation that runs these courses once every 4 months. We currently lack the capacity to run such courses, but we hope to run them as part of the BASE project due to high demand; every month approximately 4 participants request our help.

**Early action in advocacy:** The BASE project aims to prevent problems from occurring rather than simply helping clients to cope with the consequences. In the first year, we became an active member of the Racial Minority Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCS) and the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, and attended 4 quarterly meetings. In these forums we articulate to public sector organisations the needs and concerns of our users who are not in employment, education or training, so that we improve local service delivery. For example, in our April 2018 meeting, we met with representatives of the DWP and emphasised the barriers facing new refugees when claiming JSA or Universal Credit (e.g. 5-week waiting periods, lack of a National Insurance number centre in Leicester). We achieved a commitment by the DWP to investigate these issues.

**Early action through prevention work:** We have a partnership with PREVENT to counter extremism and build a stronger community of young people in Leicester. In the first year, we offered young vulnerable people positive alternatives by referring them to local voluntary organisations that supported their creative and teamwork development (e.g. the Army Cadets). 7 young people have participated to date. The young people and their parents have reported stronger confidence and resilience and improved family life quality as a result of this support.

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OUR CONTRIBUTION TO STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

The success of the BASE project depends on us working with and developing good relationships with local stakeholders and employers. In the first year, we built relationships with the following stakeholders to ensure best outcomes for our project beneficiaries:

**Leicester City Council:** Our relationship with Leicester City Council is critical to the BASE project as it is the body with the most influence over local service delivery in our community. In the first year, our key message to Leicester City Council was that *we are working with disadvantaged people in their community and are supporting the Council in seeking new ways of solving problems*. In our first year, we negotiated with Council services from the following departments: Housing Options, Adult Social Care, Adult Learning, Children’s Social Care, Leicester Libraries, Universal Credit, grants officers, and Voluntary Action Leicestershire. As a result, 23 people achieved better housing; 16 referrals were made to Adult Social Care; 12 people benefited from Adult Learning; and 38 people were helped with rent and Council tax arrears.

**Job Centre Plus (Department of Work and Pensions):** In the first year, we established a formal agreement with Job Centre Plus to refer people to BASE for work placements and pre-employability training. In our first year, 11 work placements were successfully completed. Participants completed 30 hours of administration work or casework in our offices; this meant that even if someone was not offered a job, they gained valuable experience and a reference. More work placements are on the horizon and we look forward to working with Job Centre Plus to create new opportunities and meet participants’ needs. Our future plan is to urge the Job Centre to encourage large employers to ring-fence a number of jobs for BASE Project beneficiaries with barriers to employment.

**Local MPs:** Our relationship with local MPs is critical for our participants facing issues of concern. In our first year, our key message to our local MPs was that *we offer free, quality support to their constituents and we have insight into local issues, backed up by evidence*. We approached local MPs by writing to them on behalf of our participants when their issue could not be solved by ourselves or other local services. In the first year, we successfully contacted local MPs on behalf of 21 participants.

**Partnerships with other organisations:** We work with 14 other local organisations to develop expertise, share best practice and set up referral pathways for our users. Since May 2017, we have had 23 new referrals to the BASE project, and have gone on to provide a service to 90% of these people. Key to this success are our flexible eligibility criteria and very limited conditions for referrals/access to the BASE project. We also make referrals to partner organisations – in the first year, 90% of our referrals were to emergency hardship schemes.

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BUILDING ON PEOPLE’S STRENGTHS

**At Afro Innovation, we believe in what people can contribute and the potential in their ideas.**

The BASE Project participants have been in the lead in putting forward suggestions for real improvements in the lives of their communities. In the first year, we have been guided by our participants in our choices about new ways of working.

We discovered that a large, untapped group of people that could benefit from the BASE project are refugees and asylum seekers who are struggling to access higher education. Some never had the chance to study before arriving in the UK; others had been accepted at university but were unable to enrol, and others had to abandon their studies when they were forced to leave their countries. Following this people-led expression of need, we established a new line of work within BASE called ‘BASE Academic Support’.

BASE Academic Support has proven to be very popular and in high demand. As it was not part of our original BASE application, we are hoping to turn it into a stand-alone project that was born entirely out of the strengths and the demand of local refugees and asylum seekers.

THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

* 36 adults have found work as a direct result of our employment support
* 1000 people are more aware about their rights and responsibilities as a result of advocacy support and are encouraged about life in the UK
* 15 refugees and asylum seekers are more aware of options available regarding education and training through BASE academic support
* Increased community engagement for 30 isolated persons through community events.

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LESSONS LEARNT

One of the lessons learnt in the first year of the project is that we need to do more to work with employers and partners to develop outreach initiatives so that beneficiaries can access tailored skills opportunities towards better jobs. We currently do not have financial and staff resources to perform outreach activities. We are also keen to engage with beneficiaries who wish to set up their own small business. The top-up grant will enable us to:

* Run a new initiative with the local Job Centre Plus to encourage large employers in Leicester and Leicestershire to ring-fence a number of jobs for BASE Project beneficiaries that face barriers to employment.
* Encourage local employers to provide ‘return ships’ for women wo have faced long absences from the workforce due to caring responsibilities
* Help beneficiaries who wish to start their own business by assessing their business needs and providing relevant training.

Another lesson learnt is that the strongest need of our beneficiaries is to establish a workstation for people without computer/internet access, and deliver trainings in ICT, English, employability and life skills that we had no space to run previously. However, despite strong local need (in the past month, 5 people have asked for Life Skills), our charity has very few facilities for providing computer access and training. Currently we do not have our own in-house ICT equipment; therefore, we can only people who are already quite skilled and cannot fully implement our BASE Project for those who face the highest skills barriers to finding and keeping a job.

We are currently struggling to meet increased user demand due to shortage of staff with trained ability to support rising numbers of users with knowledge and expertise on employment, education, housing, destitution, debt management, etc. At the beginning of the BASE Project we used to see 15 people a week; this has increased to 55 with more complex needs. The ability to support our users is restricted by our resources, so we have had to implement a waiting list and restrict the services we offer.

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FUTURE PLANS

**TO EXPAND THE BASE PROJECT**

We want to work with more people with experience of unemployment to get back into work; work with local and regional partners on creating new work opportunities for the community; run trainings, workshops and social marketing campaigns; and support our organisational development to become genuine ‘Investors in People’.

**TO SECURE ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR ‘BASE ACADEMIC SUPPORT’**

There is high demand for access to education and specialist training. We are keen to explore additional funding to increase our holistic support in this area by securing separate funding for ‘BASE Academic Support’.



**Address**  
60 Charles Street  
Leicester  
LE1 1FB  
United Kingdom

info@afroinno.org

0116 208 1341

afro.innovation

http://www.afroinno.org/

Afro Innovation Group

@afroinnovation

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